

LESSON ONE

The Articles of Confederation

INTRODUCTION

With the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress recognized the need to establish guidelines for a new government. Congress's overriding concern was to insure that the government was not a strong centralized body similar to British Parliament. With that in mind, the Articles of Confederation were drafted and adopted, providing the structure for governing the new nation. Unfortunately, the limitations of the Articles of Confederation became readily apparent soon after their implementation.

OBJECTIVES

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Describe the historical events that led to drafting and adopting the Articles of Confederation.
2. Define and explain the meaning of the term *confederation*.
3. List the provisions of the Articles of Confederation.
4. Analyze the Articles of Confederation and identify their strengths and weaknesses.

STANDARDS OF LEARNING

This lesson meets the National Standards of Learning in the areas of chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, and historical issues analysis.

MATERIALS

Articles of Confederation Graphic Organizer
Student-Friendly Version of the Articles of Confederation
Articles of Confederation Graphic Organizer—Teacher Answer Key

STRATEGY

1. Remind students that in the 1770s the American colonies were attempting to break away from British rule. As a result, it was necessary for the new states to join together for their mutual survival and protection.
2. Review with students the events that led up to the drafting and adoption of the Articles of Confederation:
 - A series of actions taken by Great Britain in its North American colonies lead to colonists' resentment, including the Proclamation Line (1763), the Sugar Act (1764), the Stamp Act (1765), the Townshend Acts (1767), the Tea Act (1773), and the Intolerable Acts (1774).
 - Events in the North American colonies further aggravate tensions between Great Britain and American colonists, including the Non-Importation Agreement (October 1767), the Boston Massacre (March 1770), the Boston Tea Party (December 1773), the Battles of Concord and Lexington (April 1775), and the Battle of Bunker Hill (June 1775).

- King George III declares the American colonies in rebellion (August 1775).
- The Second Continental Congress adopts the Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776).
- Congress appoints a committee to draft the Articles of Confederation to create a new government for the united colonies (June 1776).
- The Second Continental Congress approves the Articles of Confederation and sends them to the states for ratification (November 1777).
- The Articles of Confederation are ratified (March 1781).

3. Give each student a copy of the Articles of Confederation Graphic Organizer. Ask students what the word *confederation* means to them. After a brief class discussion, share the formal definition:

confederation—a group of states united under a weak central government.

Write the definition on the board, and have students write it in the appropriate location on their graphic organizers.

4. Give each student a copy of the Student-Friendly Version of the Articles of Confederation. Introduce students to the document by reading and discussing, as a class, the preamble and first three articles. Ensure that students understand the content and meaning of each article.

Explain to students that the Articles of Confederation granted certain powers to the national government while giving others to the state governments. Divide students into small groups. Have half of the groups read all thirteen articles to determine the powers the document granted to the national government. Have the remainder of the groups read all thirteen articles to determine the powers that were given to the state governments.

5. Reconvene the class and have students share their findings. Have students record the findings in the appropriate sections of their graphic organizers. Take some time to ensure that students have placed information in the correct portions of their graphic organizers. Finally, answer any questions students may have, and then review the concepts and powers described in the Articles of Confederation, ensuring that students understand the natural tensions created by attempts to balance state and federal powers. [Note: For reference, see the Articles of Confederation Graphic Organizer—Teacher Answer Key.]

6. Facilitate a class discussion in which students analyze their findings, focusing on the issues and concerns regarding governing the nation under the Articles of Confederation. Answering the following questions will help students understand how weaknesses in the Articles prevented the national government from operating effectively:

- Under the Articles of Confederation, how did the national government fund its programs?
- What did the monetary system look like?
- How were national laws enforced?
- How were amendments to the Articles enacted?
- What was necessary to pass new laws?
- What was the role of the executive branch?

After identifying and discussing these issues, have students record the answers in the appropriate bottom section of their graphic organizers.

7. With the class, summarize what students have learned about the Articles of Confederation. What were the Articles of Confederation? When and why were the Articles written? What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Articles? What were the challenges of governing the country under the Articles?

LESSON EXTENSION

Have each student write an acrostic poem using the letters in the word *confederation*. Invite several students to share their completed poems with the class.



Detail from an engraving in the *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), February 27, 1788.
From the collections of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

CONFEDERATION: _____

State Government Powers	National Government Powers
Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••••••	

STUDENT-FRIENDLY VERSION OF THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

Preamble

To everyone who reads this document, we the undersigned delegates send greeting.

Articles of Confederation and permanent union among the states of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Article I: The new nation will be called “The United States of America.”

Article II: All states are independent from one another. The state governments will retain all powers that are not specifically given to the national Congress.

Article III: The states agree to maintain friendly relationships. They will defend one another in times of trouble and protect their shared liberties and mutual welfare.

Article IV: To maintain friendly relations among the states, all free inhabitants can move among the states and conduct business therein without extra taxes. If fugitives from one state are living in another state, they should be sent back to face prosecution. All records and judicial rulings applying to individuals in one state shall be accepted by all other states.

Article V: Every year, state legislatures will send representatives to the national Congress. Each state shall send no less than two and no more than seven delegates, and each state will have only one vote in Congress.

Article VI: No state can enter into a formal alliance with any foreign power. Neither states nor Congress shall give any title of nobility to anyone in the United States. Two or more states cannot enter into their own treaty. States cannot maintain standing armies or navies without Congress’s approval. Unless invaded, no state shall wage war without permission from Congress.

Article VII: In times of war, state legislatures will appoint all officers under the rank of colonel and maintain their armies.

Article VIII: To pay for war, states will receive money from the national Treasury in proportion to the amount of land they own. The state legislatures will collect the taxes needed to fund the Treasury.

Article IX: The national Congress will have the power to:

- declare war
- negotiate foreign treaties
- settle disputes between states
- regulate currency
- direct the operations of land and naval forces
- borrow money from the states

Congress cannot carry out any resolution unless nine of the thirteen states agree.

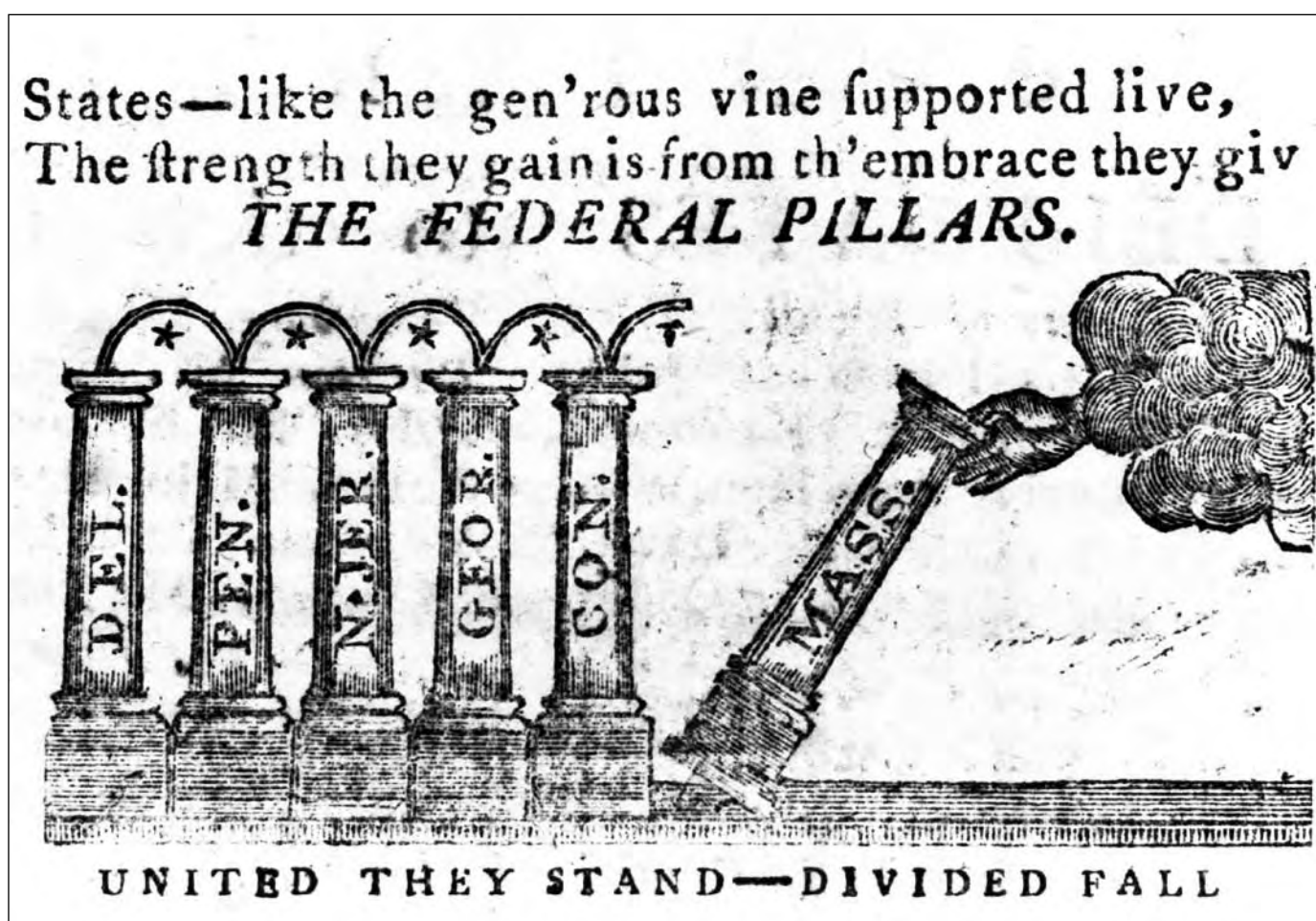
Congress will have a president to organize debate for a one-year term.

Article X: A committee of the states will be given the power to run the United States during the times Congress is in recess.

Article XI: Canada will be allowed admission into the United States. Any other colony requesting admission will need nine votes in Congress.

Article XII: Congress pledges to repay any money borrowed from individual states during the Revolution.

Article XIII: All states agree to abide by the Articles of Confederation. To amend the Articles, Congress and all of the state legislatures must unanimously agree.



"The Federal Pillars," *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston, MA), January 16, 1788. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Serial and Government Publications Division.

ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER— TEACHER ANSWER KEY

CONFEDERATION: a group of states united under a weak central government.

State Government Powers	National Government Powers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taxation • create a state court system • enforce laws passed by Congress • all powers not delegated to the national government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited powers • declare war and wage war • make treaties • settle disputes between states • petition, or request, money from the states (but no power to collect) • direct the operations of land and naval forces
Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national government cannot impose or collect taxes • no national currency • no national court system • no executive branch • no power to regulate trade among the states • one vote per state regardless of population • two-thirds majority (nine of thirteen states) needed to pass laws • unanimous consent (thirteen states) needed to amend the Articles of Confederation 	